

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 944

(Senator Charles)

Judicial Proceedings

Correctional Services - Reentry Readiness Program

This bill establishes the Reentry Readiness Program in the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS). DPSCS must work jointly with the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), the Division of Vital Records in the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) to staff and administer the program. The program must assist each “returning citizen” in (1) enrolling in vocational, workforce training, and job placement programs; (2) obtaining a certified copy of the returning citizen’s birth certificate; and (3) obtaining a photo identification or driver’s license. The bill establishes timelines for specific actions that must be taken under the program.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect State finances. The bill’s provisions largely codify current practice and/or duplicate existing statutory provisions.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: At least 90 days before a returning citizen’s anticipated release from confinement, program staff within the releasing institution must assist a returning citizen in completing and submitting any necessary applications and documents for enrolling in a vocational, workforce training, or job placement program.

At least 60 days before a returning citizen's anticipated release from confinement, the Commissioner of Correction and the program staff within a releasing institution must (1) provide the returning citizen the appropriate forms for obtaining a photo identification card under § 12-301 of the Transportation Article or a driver's license from MVA and (2) assist the returning citizen in completing the forms.

At least 30 days before a returning citizen's anticipated release from confinement, program staff must verify that the returning citizen has received the assistance required by the bill.

"Returning citizen" means an individual confined in a State correctional facility who is expected to be released within 90 days.

Current Law:

State Correctional Facilities – Release Plan

The Commissioner of Correction must issue an identification (ID) card to an incarcerated individual before release from confinement in a State correctional facility. The ID card must meet the requirements for secondary identification for the purpose of an ID card issued by MVA under § 12-301 of the Transportation Article. In addition, pursuant to Chapter 514 of 2020, the Commissioner of Correction must obtain an incarcerated individual's birth certificate and Social Security card after taking custody of an incarcerated individual (unless the incarcerated individual does not consent). If an individual's birth certificate is obtained, the Commissioner of Correction must provide the incarcerated individual with the birth certificate before release.

The Commissioner of Correction must adopt regulations (1) establishing a release plan for incarcerated individuals upon release from confinement in a State correctional facility to help identify resources to assist incarcerated individuals following release, including the provision of transportation from the facility for an incarcerated individual upon release and (2) implementing provisions concerning issuance of an ID card to incarcerated individuals on release from confinement in a State correctional facility.

Workforce Development and Adult Learning

MD Labor's Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL) oversees Correctional Education throughout Maryland's State correctional facilities. DWDAL's Office of Correctional Education (OCE) provides career training opportunities "behind the fence." Offerings vary by institution but include training in automotive skills, barbering, construction, and welding. All occupational courses lead to a portable, industry-recognized credential that contributes to an incarcerated individual's employability after release. In addition to occupational programming, OCE oversees academic and transitional courses

throughout Maryland's correctional facilities. Academic programming includes GED preparation ahead of earning a Maryland high school diploma and English as a second language courses. Prior to release, incarcerated individuals may complete transitional courses to ease their reentrance to society. These offerings include classes in parenting, employment readiness, financial literacy, and life skills.

MD Labor provides services to returning citizens through the Re-entry Navigator Initiative. Re-entry Navigators are a team of employment specialists located within the American Job Centers across the State who connect justice-involved job seekers with businesses by planning with prerelease individuals and supporting post-release job seekers. The navigators also continually establish a network of employer contacts who are interested in hiring their clients. More information on the Re-entry Navigator Initiative can be found on MD Labor's [website](#).

Task Force on the Creation of a Division of Returning Citizens and Expanded Reentry Services

Chapters 936 and 937 of 2024 established the Task Force on the Creation of a Division of Returning Citizens and Expanded Reentry Services, staffed by DPSCS. The task force must (1) identify and assess the reentry services that exist in the State; (2) identify gaps in reentry services; (3) assess the markers of successful reentry; (4) ensure that the recommendations of the task force equally consider returning citizens regardless of gender; (5) develop a plan to establish a Division of Returning Citizens within DPSCS for specified purposes; and (6) develop a plan to expand specified services for individuals after release from incarceration.

Chapters 112 and 113 of 2025 extended the termination date of the task force to June 30, 2027, and the deadline for submission of the task force's required report to October 31, 2026.

Performance Incentive Grant Fund

The Performance Incentive Grant Fund within the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy is intended to make use of the savings from the implementation of Chapter 515 of 2016, the Justice Reinvestment Act, to provide grants for specified programs and services, including, among other things, reentry programs.

Additional Comments: DPSCS advises that, through an interagency agreement with MVA, it has established a procedure for assisting incarcerated individuals with the process of obtaining MVA-issued ID cards prior to their release from State correctional facilities. DPSCS notes that before an MVA-issued ID card can be requested, an incarcerated individual must have both their birth certificate and Social Security card. DPSCS further

reports that it has a memorandum of understanding with MDH's Division of Vital Records and the Social Security Administration to facilitate this process.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Health; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Maryland Department of Transportation; Maryland Department of Labor; Department of Legislative Services

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